



SBA Names Minnesota Small Business Person of the Year

SAINT CLOUD – Tom Grones, CEO and President, and Dan Rudningen, Vice President of Sales, of GeoComm, Inc. based in St. Cloud, Minn., have been named the Minnesota Small Business Persons of the Year by the U.S. Small Business Administration.

The Small Business Person of the year is selected annually based on growth in sales or unit volume, increase in the number of employees, financial strength, innovativeness of product or service and evidence of contributions to community-oriented projects.

Grones and Rudningen were nominated by Gail Ivers of the St. Cloud Area Chamber of Commerce.

GeoComm is a business that saves lives. Although that is a simplistic description of a highly complex and technologically advanced company, at its foundation, GeoComm exists to save lives. They do it by helping public safety agencies locate people during a crisis through the use of technology and communication systems developed by GeoComm.

Grones and Rudningen started their technology firm in 1995 doing mapping for counties as they converted from rural routes to 9-1-1 compatible addresses. The original seven-member firm combined Rudningen's expertise in mapping – *Geo* – with Grones' knowledge of implementing 9-1-1 emergency communications systems – *Comm*.

GeoComm started by serving counties in Central Minnesota. Today they have customers in 585 counties in 38 states, serving 878 9-1-1 centers. They are adding clients on the average of 78 counties per year.

GeoComm has three divisions: communication, geographic information systems (GIS) and software development. Through the use of their software, they merge voice and data communications with GIS mapping. Every wired phone has a physical address for billing purposes. The 9-1-1 system was designed so that when someone dialed 9-1-1, text would appear on a screen in the emergency response center showing the name, address, and phone number of the caller, along with the police, fire and ambulance numbers that served that particular address. GeoComm's technology takes the process to the next level by presenting the information graphically: mapping the location of the caller, not just providing the address.

In addition, the company has developed automatic vehicle location software that uses GPS technology to display "real-time" vehicle locations and status so emergency services dispatchers can locate all emergency vehicles at a glance, helping speed response time during a crisis. Response time in a crisis can mean the difference between life and death.

In the last year, GeoComm released emergency notification software that uses GIS, what Grones and Rudningen call "Reverse 9-1-1." The system allows emergency services personnel to send a taped message via wireline or wireless communication to everyone in a specific geographic area selected by the originator of the message. The interest in such software has escalated in response to concerns over terrorism. Even though emergency notification has been around for awhile, GeoComm was the first to combine it with GIS.

The company also released a website GIS system that uses accurate GIS data developed for a given jurisdiction, making it available to multiple users involved in the day-to-day operation of an emergency environment. The system can be configured for use by multiple departments within a jurisdiction, allowing online collaboration and secure access to everything from emergency services zones, to evacuation routes, to chemical and biological plume modeling.

Such software services and web-based products are the future of the company, which already provide digital map maintenance and digital map hosting.

Along with business growth, has come growth in high paying jobs and new revenue entering Central Minnesota. Providing well-paying jobs is just one example of Grones' and Rudningen's commitment to their employees. They also believe employee development is critical, both technical development and professional, or career, development. The company has a staff trainer who provides programs ranging from public speaking and communications to financial management. Each employee is required to complete eight to ten hour per month of professional development, amounting to about 100 hours per year per employee.

Since 1995, GeoComm has expended a significant percent of its pre-tax net profits on gifts to charitable organizations, many within the public safety community. The company belongs to a number of organizations and supports volunteer involvement from its employees in a variety of not-for-profit groups.

An innovative business that helps save lives, a community resource that provides well-paying jobs and new revenue to the region, and a generosity of spirit for both employees and the community are the reasons Tom Grones and Dan Rudningen were selected as SBA's 2007 Small Business Persons of the Year.

Grones and Rudningen will be honored at a luncheon ceremony highlighting Small Business Week winners on Friday, May 11, 2007, at the Northland Inn in Brooklyn Park.

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